DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 294 503 HE 021 475

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TITLE Research in Art Education as a Form of Educational Consumer Protection.
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 5-9, 1988).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Art Education; Higher Education; Political Influences; *Research; Research Needs; Trend Analysis

ABSTRACT

Art education research is examined to indicate the importance of having an adequate research base to make informed educational decisions. To examine the ways in which research proceeds from sociopolitical assumptions and, in turn, shapes perceptions of the field and guides actions, the following are discussed: (1) art education research trends; (2) the sociopolitical nature of research; (3) research deficiencies in art education; and (4) prescriptions for research within a critical perspective. The objective is to focus attention on the reality-constructing nature of art education research, on the need for research agendas supportive of diverse approaches and alternative interpretations, and on the importance of incorporating in research, self-critical components that acknowledge biases and limitations. Art education researchers have often conducted experimental studies and relied on scientific methods of general education and psychology. The psychological aspects of children's artistic development has been a research focus. Arts eduction research currently seems to emphasize psychometric studies, histories, and research summaries. Ad hoc and individually conducted research is advocated as well as collaborative and funded research. 30 references. (SW)

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Research in Art Education as a Form of Educational Consumer Protection

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Running head: RESEARCH IN ART EDUCATION

(Paper presented at the 1988 American Educational Research Association Annual Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana)

HE 021 475

Abstract

Research plays a vital role in the construction of the field of art education. In this paper an examination of art education research is undertaken to indicate the importance of having an adequate research base if informed educational decisions are to be made. To examine the ways in which research both proceeds from sociopolitical assumptions and, in turn, shapes our perceptions of the field and guides actions, the following are discussed: (1) art education research trends, (2) the sociopolitical nature of research, (3) research deficiencies in art education, and (4) prescriptions for research within a critical perspective. The purpose of this paper is to focus attention on the reality-constructing nature of art education research, on the need for research agendas supportive of diverse approaches and alternative interpretations, and on the importance of incorporating in research self-critical components that acknowledge biases and limitations.

Research in Art Education as a Form of Educational Consumer Protection

In recent years, the field of art education has witnessed a specific instructional perspective articulated by the J. Paul Getty Trust, new curriculum guidelines issued by the National Art Education Association (NAEA), and major policy changes instituted by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). However, despite this flurry of activity in art education, there has been little assessment of research which might warrant some of these changes and little apparent concern with the way research provides much of the knowledge base for how our field could be developed. In this paper, an examination of art education research is undertaken to indicate the importance of having an adequate research base if informed educational decisions are to be made.

Research plays a vital role in the construction of our field.[1] Basic assumptions and points of view that are embodied in research and the meanings given to research findings form the basis of art education's foundational knowledge and operational procedures in the history and philosophy of the field, the psychology of art, curriculum development, and so on. In this paper, research in art education is examined from sociology of knowledge and critical theory perspectives as developed by Aoki (1978), Apple (1979, 1982), Berger and Luckmann (1966), Bowers (1974, 1984), and Gouldner (1979), among others. Research is discussed as providing much of the framework that constitutes our professional knowledge of the field, how we define and

solve various educational problems, and how we are able to articulate possibilities for future action. A sociology of knowledge and critical theory perspective on the research of our field indicates how informed choice in art education is related to the quantity, complexity, and types of research we have available and the extent to which we understand and can apply our research for various ends (Hamblen, in press-a).

To examine the ways in which research both proceeds from sociopolitical assumptions and, in turn, shapes our perceptions of the field and guides actions, the following will be discussed: (1) art education research trends, (2) the sociopolitical nature of research, (3) research deficiencies in art education, and (4) prescriptions for research within a critical perspective. According to Rush (1985), research can provide a form of educational consumer protection inasmuch as research, when it is presented from a variety of perspectives, provides choices for interpretation and action and empowers the art education professional to engage in the ongoing creation of the field (Hamblen, in press-a). Conversely, choice is limited to the extent our conceptual frameworks are restricted by, for example, limited research, research that is not understood, or research that is presented without debate and an acknowledgement of its biases. The purpose of this paper is to focus attention on the reality-constructing nature of art education research, on the need for funded research agendas supportive of diverse approaches, and on the importance of incorporating self-critical components in research studies that acknowledge biases and limitations.

A Review of Research Trends

A review of published research for art education between the years 1883-1939 conducted by Strange (1940) yielded the following four categories of emphasis: (1) color vision and color preference, (2) drawing and graphic abilities, (3) picture preferences and appreciation, and (4) tests and measurements in art knowledge, appreciation, and drawing. Reviews conducted by Davis (1967, 1977) for the years of 1940-1960 and 1960-1972 revealed a continuance of these four categories with the addition of the following: (1) study and teaching of art, (2) art and personality relationships, (3) creativity and art, and (4) therapeutic value of art.

There has been no subsequent comprehensive and systematic review of published research in art education, although various analyses of art education research have been undertaken (Davis, 1987; Hamblen, in press-b; LaChapelle, 1988). McFee (1984) believes that much of the research agenda for the past two decades was set in 1965 at the Penn State Conference. At this landmark conference, researchers from a variety of fields and from a variety of perspectives within art education met to discuss needed areas of study. After the death of Lowenfeld in 1960, the field of art education experienced a questioning of the strong focus on child-centered instruction that had been championed by Lowenfeld. During the 1950s, the major tenets of Lowenfeld's philosophy of instruction had been highly compatible with prior art education research inasmuch as it continued the focus on individualism, development, and

artistic expression through the use of scientific research methodologies from psychology and general education.

Most research in the near past has dealt with the artistic behavior of preprimary and primary age children in classroom settings (Hoffa, 1987). Numerous studies have been concerned with psychological determinants and have employed scientific models of investigation. Individuals, as asocial and discrete beings, have most often been the unit of study, in contradistinction to individuals being studied as part of a sociocultural matrix of influences. In many studies, art development has not been distinguished from art learning with the result that much information has been collected on how children naturally progress in their artistic expressions, but comparatively little is known about art content per se, let alone how children interact with specific art content. This research deficiency is particularly significant at this time due to the move away from child-centered toward discipline-based art education curricula.

Davis (1987) and Logan (1975) suggest that many research inadequacies in art education can be attributed to a reliance on the research models of other fields. Prior to 1950, research for art education was primarily conducted by psychologists and researchers in general education (Davis, 1987). During the 1950s and in subsequent decades, there has been a rapid growth in research and in research conducted by art educators. These trends generally parallel the professional development of art education as a discrete field of study (Hamblen, in press-b). In the 1950s, more art education faculties were composed of individuals with

doctorates, and academic tenure became dependent on published research rather than studio exhibitions (Logan, 1975). With doctorates often granted through colleges of education and with a research emphasis on artistic development, experimental and other empirically based research methods of general education were viewed favorably.

Research subsequent to Davis' review ending in 1972 has shown a trend away from statistical studies to more qualitatively oriented research. In the early 1970s, the theoretical, historical, and philosophical foundations of aesthetic education were the most popular topics of dissertations in art education (Hobbs, 1977). Ethnographic, phenomenological, philosophical, theoretical, analytical, and comparative studies have become common fare among published research. Articles published in Studies in Art Education during the 1960s compared to those published in the 1980s graphically reveal an increase in research with a qualitative thrust. A review of dissertations written between 1964 and 1985 on the education of the professional artist in higher education likewise revealed an increase in numbers and methodological approaches and a decrease in experimental studies (LaChapelle, 1988). A study done specifically on histories published in Art Education (1948-1986) and in Studies in Art Education (1959-1986) reveals both a steady increase in the absolute numbers of histories published as well as a significant diversity in the types of quantitative and qualitative historical methodologies employed (Hamblen, in press-b).

As Davis (1967, 1977) noted in his reviews of research, the early

research focus on the psychological aspects of children's artistic development has been maintained along with the appearance of new research focuses. A concern with artistic development constitutes a common thread in art education research up to the present. Arts education research at this time consists primarily of psychometric studies, histories, and research summaries ("Editorial--Broadening our Scope," 1987).

Davis (1987) believes that by relying on the topics and scientific methods of general education and psychology, some of the research questions art educators should have been asking have been ignored and others have been distorted. Art education researchers have often conducted experimental studies without a strong data base. According to Davis, art educators in general have approached research inductively and have so-called worked backwards by trying to generalize without having adequate knowledge to do so. While research in art education has grown, it has done so at random, and no attempt has been made to build bodies of information basic to art education theory and practice.

To rectify the random nature of much of our research, Davis (1987) suggests that time be spent on compiling research reviews and descriptive information on the field. LaChapelle's (1988) aforementioned review of dissertations revealed an increase in descriptive and historical types of research. This is significant in that "dissertations can serve as possible harbingers of future scholarly research" (p. 72). LaChapelle also noted that rarely were dissertations part of a research collaborative project which is a fairly common approach to dissertation

research in the social, physical, and biological sciences. Personally chosen research, LaChapelle believes, has resulted in a fair amount of duplication as well as studies of questionable value. It needs to be noted that the dissertations reviewed for Chapelle's study originated from a variety of disciplines and were selected on the basis of subject matter alone. The perceived need to have some consistent approach to research, however, is a fairly common concern expressed in art education literature. Hoffa (1987) would have us set an overall, comprehensive agenda for research that would involve the identification of appropriate research problems and methodologies and would consist of rationally managed research, overseen by governmental and arts agencies.[2]

The Sociopolitical Dimensions of Research

In the reviews and critiques of art education research presented thus far, research trends have been approached as socially disengaged and politically neutral. While some scholars in the field may have faulted an excessive reliance on scientific, experimental methods of psychology, this reliance has not been seen as part of a larger, socially dependent and reality-constructing framework. Art education's past dependence on tightly controlled experimental and empirical studies derived from other disciplines can be interpreted as part of an attempt to gain discipline legitimacy as well as part of the larger technocratic-rational mind set of Western cultures (Freedman, 1987; Hamblen, 1985, 1987). Individualism, change equated with progress, and a reliance on expert knowledge are some of the characteristics of Western modernity

(Bowers, 1974, 1984). These are also characteristics highly compatible with research that focuses on individual expression, developmentalism, and the experimental control and manipulation of variables.

Research and policy agendas are not politically neutral. They allow for some views, interpretations, and practices in education, and they obscure or deny others. Research agendas always have a sociopolitical, reality-constructing dimension. Those agendas, however, that partake of the legitimating patina of scientism or those that are supported by powerful foundations and institutions tend to resist examination. They also may present programmatic solutions to highly complex educational problems.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the many parallels emerging between art education and general education policy and research agendas. One example, however, can provide some indication of the cautions art educators might well consider. The recent U. S. Department of Education publication titled What Works (1986), a summary of research findings for education, is part of the national government's agenda for educational policy and research. However, as Glass (1987) notes, this is not a comprehensive summation of research findings in key areas of education. Rather, it is a highly selective compilation that severly simplifies the research data in some areas, minimizes the controversies attached to others, and completely ignores some issues that are not consistent with the views of political conservatives. Glass (1987) also analyzes the mode of presentation and distribution of this publication in relationship to its legitimation of a politically conservative

educational agenda. Much the same situation appears to be developing in art education wherein policy and research are being presented in simplified, attractive, and widely disseminated formats that are funded by governmental agencies or philanthropic foundations.

Art education research has been characterized by diverse, small, and highly independent research agendas instigated most often by individual art educators and occasionally supported by universities, philanthropic foundations, or governmental agencies. This is changing. Recent developments in art education suggest that while ad hoc, serendipitous research efforts will undoubtedly continue, there is also afoot larger, organized research projects which are supported by governmental, philanthropic, and academic institutions. Moreover, some of these institutions appear to be converging toward a commonality of goals. For example, Bersson (1987) has noted the strong governmental agency support given to formalistic and fine art-oriented curricula, which also characterizes the curricula supported by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts (Hamblen, 1987). National Endowment for the Arts sponsorship of the arts-in-education program is consistent with National Art Education Association curricular guidelines as well as the particular interpretation the Getty Center for Education in the Arts has given to discipline-based art education. Entire issues of most of the major art education research journals have been devoted to explanations of DBAE as defined by the Getty Trust, and programmatic research, i.e., research supportive of DBAE, has been instituted by governmental and philanthropic

organizations ("$800,000 National Arts Education Research Center," 1987). Although one might be sympathetic with the general goals of such a comprehensive research agenda, it is essential that art educators question whether it is wise--or sufficient--to conduct research toward a particular end or for the development of a single type of instruction.

As discussed by Rush (1985), it is not research per se that affords educational consumer protection. Rather, it is research that is conducted by independent researchers, that proceeds from a variety of institutional bases of support, and that embodies as a critical stance the examination of sociopolitical content and impact. Control of research agendas can be a most powerful form of information control.

Research for Critical Consciousness

Research, in and of itself, offers no panacea to the search for truth in education or for attaining educational balance among conflicting viewpoints. However, the reality-constructing nature of research can be examined for the possibilities and limitations it places on our ability to know and to act. Sociology of knowledge and critical theory perspectives help us to understand the social embeddedness of the interpretative frameworks used to set, interpret, review, and utilize research agendas and research results.

Research topics are initially perceived, selected, and formulated within a matrix of personal, professional, and sociocultural assumptions of what has educational value and importance. "Researchers do not solve problems, they set them" (Glass, 1987, p. 9). Research, from its inception to the utilization of its findings, consists of a series of

selections and interpretations that are contingent upon assumptions, values, and resources--all of which are contextually embedded in the sociocultural climate of one's professional time and place. As Glass (1987) and Donmoyer (1985) have noted, research data do not have significance separate from the meanings given to them; meaning arises from interpretive frameworks and modes of knowing which shape both the type of research that is conducted and how research findings are interpreted.

Research, as a mode of knowing and of acting and as a way of providing data for future actions, constitutes much of our professional stock of knowledge. As such, research can be part of our taken-for-granted reality-constructing actions and is itself a product of our educational priorities. Research, however, can also be used to reveal its own problematic nature and thereby empower us to participate in the creation as well as correction and refinement of our profession. Informed choices in education, wherein alternatives and the possible consequences of those alternatives are weighed, are dependent upon the range and types of research we have available and the extent to which we understand them to be choices.

> Research, when done from a variety of perspectives and from a range of methodologies, provides choices for interpretation and action and empowers the art education professional to engage in the ongoing creation of the field. Also, when a range of research is available on particular issues in art education, the field itself can enter a period of heightened

> critical consciousness wherein previous conceptions are called into question and the human authorship of any one particular viewpoint is thrown into sharp relief. (Hamblen, in press-a)

Conversely, our professional conceptual framework and our existential choices are limited to the extent we have major areas of research deficiencies, limited research, research that is not understood, or research presented without debate and acknowledgement of its biases. Current trends in art education toward research agendas being set by powerful institutions with similar assumptions bears close monitoring. Research activities conducted under the auspices of such institutions have to-date exhibited preselected and limited perspectives that have been presented with minimal formalized debate (Hamblen, 1987; Zeller, 1987).

Research Deficiencies in Art Education

We have tended to examine and evaluate research on the basis of its methodological validity and reliability rather than the assumptions and sociopolitical framework within which methodologies exist and the assumptions from which they arise. Barring the qualifications of time, energy, and resources, research trends provide indications of what art educators consider significant and worthy of exploration. Conversely, research areas with little or no research are indicative of what is considered of lesser value or what is considered to be nonproblematic. In the latter case, educational decisions can be made by a select few, and decisions can be presented as being beyond debate and controversy.

Although art criticism was mentioned as an area of study for aesthetic education programs as early as 1965, very little research in

art education exists specific to art criticism instruction. Over two decades later, when art criticism is considered vital to a discipline-based program, prescribed policy as well as practice is occurring prior to the existence of adequate research information. The result has been the prescription of a singular approach to art criticism which ignores the range of options available for instruction (Hamblen, 1986, 1987).

Bersson (1987) notes that art education's emphasis on the psychology of the individual, together with current attempts to implement subject-centered curricula, has resulted in education in art that minimizes the sociocultural dimensions of student psychology, learning, and art content. Characteristics of learning in nonstudio instruction, the art of minorities, women's aesthetics, collaborative art, and art learning in nonformal settings are but some of the areas in which there has been relatively little research. Areas of research deficiencies have tended to be those that defy easy resolution, that are less amenable to quantitative approaches, and that have constituencies outside mainstream culture.

In many instances in art education, nationally funded and nationally originated programs have been proposed and implemented without pilot studies or preliminary field assessments. One of the criticisms of the artist-in-the-schools program of the NEA in the early 1970s was that its feasibility was never tested prior to nationwide implementation. Major policy changes continue to be made without adequate preliminary research or even without recourse to previously conducted pertinent studies. Some programs have been successful in terms of implementation and

continuity by dint of the institutional power and backing they conjure up in response to criticisms. When research is finally conducted, research data can be easily used to justify the time, effort, and emotional commitment expended on what appears to be accomplished, undisputed fact and reality.

While much of the agenda for research in art education for the 1970s and 1980s was set in 1965 as a result of the Penn State Conference, such research was most often conducted on an ad hoc basis, although specific programs and studies were funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, CEMREL, the Rockefeller Commission, and various universities, such as Harvard Project Zero. The intensity of the debates elicited by the publication of information on the policies of these agencies and institutions, however, would suggest that there was little danger that any of these studies or programs would achieve hegemonic proportions. Also, much of this research has been understood as being but one part of the overall art education agenda and has not been programmatic in focus. The research resulting from the Penn State Conference was diverse and often developed from the interests of individual researchers rather than programmatic prescriptions for the entire field (McFee, 1984). This has probably contributed substantially to the random nature of much of our research as well as major research deficiencies in the field. Proposals that we set a national research agenda or that we formulate a rational plan of research action are undoubtedly a reaction to the serendipitous nature of much of our research. However, in this paper it is suggested that national and rationally planned research agendas, unless dedicated

to diverse approaches and concerns, will actually exacerbate our research problems. Vital areas will continue to be ignored, and research will be focused toward particular, prescribed ends.

A study mentioned earlier in this paper that was conducted on the histories of our field that have been published in Art Education and in Studies in Art Education suggests that there maybe a so-called natural development and even a naturally resulting coverage within various types of research (Hamblen, in press-b). While none of the published histories recorded in this study were part of a planned, national agenda to shore up our historical knowledge of the field, it was found, nonetheless, that there has been a development toward an increase in the numbers of studies conducted, an increase in diversity of methodologies employed, and, in recent years, a concern with areas that have previously not received research attention. Moreover, metahistories have been written exhibiting an awareness of the directions historical research has followed and what may be needed for the future. This is not to imply that much more could not be done in historical research or that historical research characteristics are necessarily the same as other research areas of our field. As part of the study, it was proposed that much of the development of historical research parallels the development of art education as a field of professional study. Despite these qualifications, however, questions should be raised as to whether ad hoc research might not naturally provide a major portion of needed research.

In this paper, it is proposed that we need ad hoc and individually

conducted research as well as collaborative and funded research supportive of diverse approaches and alternative interpretations, separate from any particular programmatic outcomes. Collaborative studies that are part of a research group's agenda and funded research can also be used to focus in on areas of particular research needs. Such a comprehensive approach to research, allowing for serendipitous research and research with a planned specificity, would embody democratic principles and speak to the needs of our pluralistic educational populations.

Conclusion

We need to ask the following types of questions of researchers and of institutions funding research: Who has decided what is to be studied? Who has been involved in setting the research agenda--and who has not been involved--and why? Why is such-and-such a study being done? Who benefits? Who might not benefit? Who controls and interprets the results? What has been omitted from the study--and why?

> It is the consciousness of choice, the weighing of alternatives, and the explicit acknowledgement that one has engaged in a process of selection and interpretation that are the decisive factors which distinguish acting existentially from merely acting. Educators who merely have recourse to what currently exists in art education without consciousness of its implications and limitations are still operating within the natural attitude of taken-for-granted knowledge. (Hamblen, in press-a)

Research should be available from a variety of perspectives, and it should be presented as problematic and open to interpretation. This does not mean that research results can be interpreted willy nilly or that it makes no difference as to how results are given application. Rather, if we understand research as presenting options and understand the implications of variable interpretations and applications, research can provide a way for us to examine, negotiate, and modify major portions of our profession. Research should be conducted in light of its problematic nature, and, when completed, research results should be examined for their reality-constructing possibilities and limitations.

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Notes

[1] In this paper, research encompasses formal and informal investigations involving qualitative or quantitative methodologies. This includes theoretical constructions and models that appear in published materials, are discussed at conferences, and are presented in instructional settings.

[2] In an attempt to gather baseline, descriptive data, the Executive Director of the National Art Education Association is soliciting suggestions for demographic surveys and is proposing a publication series outlining the results (T. Hatfield, personal communication, January 6, 1988). The National Endowment for the Arts and the Department of Education have funded an Arts Education Research Center to study art instruction over a three-year period, and the Endowment Advisory Committee on Arts Education has commissioned a report on the status of the arts in elementary and secondary public schools.